

The National Holiday Camps

The picture below is of Marchants Hill Camp, Surrey



A Unique Experience

In February 1939 before the beginning of WWII, the Ministry of Health decided to set up fifty national holiday camps for children. These camps would, if necessary, accommodate children and other persons who might need to be evacuated during a war. It was determined that these camps should be sited in places near to urban centres so that they should be easily accessible and should not be too close to seaside resorts so that they

would not cause 'unfair competition' with the resorts. It was thought that these camps would give children from deprived backgrounds a unique experience of living in rural communities.

The 1939 Act

An Act to progress the matter was passed in May 1939 which determined:

- The camps would be built and owned by an ad hoc central National Camps Corporation (one for England and Wales and one for Scotland) financed by the Treasury
- In the advent of war, to be used as Evacuation Camps by the Ministry of Health's evacuation organisation to accommodate children and other persons "non essential to a war economy" evacuated from large towns and other dangerous areas
- In peace conditions to be rented and used either education authorities as camp schools or by approved non-profit-making or public utility organisations as holiday camps for the rapidly increasing body of workers, with their families, who are obtaining holidays with pay.

Camp Design Competition & Specification

The design of these camps was decided by a competition and the specification for the design was for:

- A residential school for 400 children between the ages of 5 and 15 years, divided as follows: infants, boys 40, girls 40; other children, boys 160, girls 160. The camp to be used by education authorities for children transferred periodically from town schools.
- A holiday camp for children in the same category as the above.
- Evacuation camp in time of emergency for children in the same category as above.

The winning design for construction in cedarwood was the work of Miss Jean Shufflebotham, A.R.I.B.A., and Mr. J. H. Sheppard, A.R.I.B.A. and successfully met most of the requirements of economy, teaching, health and camouflage. Its cost was estimated at £20,580.

Thirty Camps Are Built

A National Camps Corporation Ltd company was set up and they considered 155 sites of which 30 were considered as suitable. The work was put out to tender and was let to four different companies. The sites where the camps were to be constructed were: Berks: Cockpole Green, Hurley. Bucks: Horseleys Green, Stokenchurch, Moor End. Cheshire: Marton (Newchurch), Somerford. Denbigh: Colomendy Hall (two sites). Derby: Woolley Bridge. Hants: Overton. Herts: Nettleden. Lancs: Whalley. Northumberland: Bellingham, Hexham. Oxford: Henley, Kennylands, Peppard. Staffs: Blithbury, Rugeley. Surrey: Cranleigh, Ewhurst, Merstham, Tilford. Sussex: Hartfield, Itchingfield. Worcs: Bewdley. York (East Riding); Eton. York (West Riding.); Grassington, Linton, Pateley Bridge.

How They Were Used

Many of these camps were used during the war to accommodate evacuees although some were used to accommodate servicemen and war workers. However, after the war many were used to provide rural living experience for deprived children.

Afterwards

After the 1950's, some of these camps were demolished and the sites used for housing and school provision. However, some are still in use as activity and adventure centres.

The following site has pictures and information about some of these camps.

[City of Coventry Boarding School: National Camps Corporation ...](http://www.cityofcoventryboarding.com/national-camps-corporation-origins...)
wyrefarmed.blogspot.com/.../national-camps-corporation-ncc-origins...

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